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ABSTRACT

Community involvement in Main Township High School District 207 has come to be known as "Partnership--The Maine Way." Maine has acknowledged that in order to shape the public good will and understanding, large numbers of parents, students, teachers, and citizens must be included personally. Maine looks at 1973-74 with pride concerning three significant educational developments. First, a $6.5 million bond referendum for building construction succeeded in early December by a large majority. Then, during the second semester "Partnership--The Maine Way" resulted in two successful and innovative educational concepts. One--entitled "Rites of Spring"--was a two day fine arts festival conducted at Maine Township North aimed at providing general exposure of the fine arts through community participation and attendance at festival activities. The other--named "Let's Talk"--was a two day educational opportunity held at Maine Township High School West for business and industries in the Des Plaines community to point out, by display and personal contact, its leadership to the community as an educational resource.
(Author/MW)

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PARTNERSHIP -- THE MAINE WAY

John T. Benka

How many of us as teachers, administrators and Board of Education members have been the target of lamentings that our schools are for the most part -- ineffective. The literature of the late 1960's and early 1970's frequently reports the shortcomings of the schools in criticisms such as:

-- The schools are not attending to the developme
fundamental skills;

-- The curriculum is irrelevant;

-- The program is rigid and lacks humaneness.

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There is no doubt that these are compelling "people" concerns. These same concerns are fundamental to the operation of the public schools.

The primary and fundamental task of educational leadership for the 70's, the 80's and beyond must be a response to the people. At no time in the history of education has this mandate been as clear -- educators must be in close personal contact with their communities about what the schools are doing and about what they are to do. Educators need only to review the results from the latest polls or examine the results of recently defeated referenda to fine unmistakable indications that citizens everywhere want ever increasing involvement and better understandings of what is taking place in the schools. When opportunities for such involvement present themselves educators too often have either generally not known how to involve large numbers of people in school affairs or they have allowed involvement to mean only "selling people on a project".

Involvement in Maine Township High School District 207 has come to be known as "Partnership -- The Maine Way". Maine has acknowledged that in order to shape the public good will and understanding, large numbers of parents, students, teachers and citizens must be included personally. Our total communities' stated issues and needs serve as the target center around which educational plans, proposals, and activities for the Maine Township High Schools are constructed and carried out.

Maine looks at 1973-74 with pride on three significant educational developments -- each the result of "Partnership -- The Maine Way". First, a $6.5 million bond referendum succeeded in early December by a majority of nearly three to one in support of additional building construction.

Then, during the second semester "Partnership -- The Maine Way" resulted in two successful and innovative educational concepts. One -- entitled "Rites of Spring" -- was a two-day fine arts festival conducted at Maine Township High School North aimed at providing general exposure of theatre, dance, poetry, music, film and art to the students while strengthening school-community relations through community participation and attendance at festival activities.

The other -- named "Let's Talk" -- was also a two day educational opportunity held at Maine Township High School West for business and industries in the Des Plaines community to point out, by display and and personal contact, its leadership to the community as an educational resource, to spark student interest in locally available industry,

products, and employment opportunities and to relate to the community at large as a neighbor. Both programs required organizational and management skills from the time each idea was conceived through implementation, to assessment. These skills were available to Maine throughout the schools and the community, were assembled, and in fact produced bright educational opportunities for the student body.

As "Rites" evolved, its impetus for development came from the partnership between the school staff, student body, and the Chicagoland community of professional artists---Illinois Arts Council. Mr. Kermit Lindberg, Art Department Chairman at North coordinated student, staff, and performer ideas, suggestions and plans received during the fall and winter quarters and assembled the program itinerary and professional fine arts community and instructional staff.

The active partnership between school and community for "Let's Talk" was generated by Mr. M. P. Venema, former Board Chairman of Universal Oil Products and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Association of Manufacturers. Eight participating Des Plaines corporations formed the nucleus for planning and developing the involvement of nearly seventy businesses in this educational adventure.

In both projects, the preliminary planning and the program development hinged on results of community surveys which determined needs and interests. Large-scale committee responsibilities for public relations, finance and operations were also integral parts of each project as it moved to the implementation stage.

The educational results of the partnership involvements between school and community which undergirded each project were most exciting.

"Rites" took the form of a totally new and revised curriculum for two school days. Some 2,000 students from throughout the Maine schools participated with nearly 50 professional artists and performers in the study of areas of the arts such as: radio and television communication and production, advertising, contemporary and folk dance, musical score arrangement and composition, mime, the electric sound, sculpture, and painting. Nearly 200 other students participated in supervised field trips to Chicago's Goodman Theatre and other theatres in the area.

Highlighting the all school assemblies and the many additional evening performances which nearly two thousand citizens attended were: The Chicago Symphony String Quartet, Art Hodes -- a pioneer in Chicago jazz, T. Daniel -- renowned mime, Concert pianist, Dennis Moffat, and the Gus Giordano Contemporary Jazz Dance Company.

The theme of "partnership" extended through the important budget preparation phase as the Maine North Fine Arts Booster organization and the district Board of Education of Maine Township High School District 207 shared equally in absorbing the $6,000.00 cost.

This same support and involvement of the local community in developing an educational effort was even more astounding as a $50,000.00 "Let's Talk" Festival budget was adopted and implemented by its finance

committee -- funds solely derived from the business community involved in the project. End result -- an admission free festival where some 68 display booths were created and built on about 14,500 feet of floor space in the Maine West gymnasium; face-to-face contact between some 15,000 citizens and 5,000 students with business and industry of the community; 49 showings of a three-screen slide presentation describing the history of business in the community and narrated by Chicago TV personality Fahey Flynn; distribution of thousands of commemorative brochures; distribution of press kits to all Chicagoland newspapers; distribution of 50,000 invitations; publication of a 24-page supplement to the regular edition of the Des Plaines Suburban Times; speaking engagements at the Des Plaines community's civic organization meetings.

Each of these two major educational events clearly signal the importance of involvement of people in response to the educational needs of all people in the community -- children and adults alike.

Did these efforts succeed in bringing together the community and the schools to the mutual benefit of young people? Our response is an unqualified "YES". Both projects created a new and different learning climate for students in that the regular school day was modified in favor of total school participation and involvement through non-traditional learning modes. Each project was instrumental in the on-going development of civic pride in education through partnership in the process. Students of all ages met new kinds of "teachers" -- the performer, the artist, the journalist, the manufacturer.

But beyond all of this, follow up studies presently being conducted in evaluation of each of these activities, indicate that new waves of excitement are rolling through the community and through the Maine Schools.

A new citizen Advisory Council has been formed in order to provide other kinds of sound educational input as Maine revises and builds instructional programs for this year and beyond. Educators are now working with renewed vigor as partners with the business community in developing an educational program for junior and senior high school students, designed to improve young people's understanding of the economic system and the particular role that local industry plays in that system.

Both partnership programs had yet another and hopefully an even deeper impact -- that being the instruction to young people that as the future electorate, they assume full partnership in the growth and development of the community's largest investment -- the school.

Maine Township welcomes the student citizen and the adult citizen alike in cementing educational 'PARTNERSHIP -- THE MAINE WAY".